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Thoughts on  
Protestantism  
Adolf Harnack

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THE PRESENT POSITION  
OF  
PROTESTANTISM

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

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THOUGHTS  
ON THE  
PRESENT POSITION  
OF  
PROTESTANTISM

BY  
ADOLF HARNACK

*TRANSLATED, WITH THE AUTHOR'S SANCTION, BY*

THOS. BAILEY SAUNDERS

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## AUTHOR'S PREFACE.

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*In the autumn of last year my esteemed friend Mr Bailey Saunders paid me a visit in Berlin. In the course of our conversations we touched upon the present position of Protestantism in Germany, and I begged him to read a lecture which I had delivered on this subject. My friend thought that it was one which might be suitable for an English audience; and as he offered to undertake the translation himself, I readily gave my assent.*

*I need scarcely say that I am far from desiring to exercise any influence on the state of ecclesiastical affairs in England. Ecclesiastical affairs are like domestic: they are of a delicate nature, and no one has any real knowledge of them who does not live in*

*the house. If a stranger interferes, he soon makes enemies of all its inmates.*

*But since the times of the Reformation all the Teutonic nations have been going through the same kind of inner experience. "It is the same arena in which we stand, and the same battle which we have to fight." It is now this, now that nation which makes an advance; and there are moments when they stand shoulder to shoulder against the common foe. If I am not mistaken, the latter is what is happening now.*

*The chief enemy to-day is not political Catholicism, or "Ultramontanism," although that is a tendency which never ceases to be dangerous. It is Catholicism as a religion and an ecclesiastical spirit which threatens us; it is clericalism and ritualism, the alluring union of exalted piety and solemn secularity, and the substitution for religion of obedience. This is the spirit which is knocking at the doors of the Protestant Churches in Germany—I fear also in England—and is demanding admittance. It has mighty allies. All*

*those who in their hearts are indifferent to religion are its secret friends. In their view, if Religion and Church are to continue to exist at all, it is the Catholic form of them which is still the most tolerable and the most rational.*

*In the struggle with this enemy, true Protestantism has a hard task ; for by its very constitution it cannot fight in serried ranks, and it is always in a state of internal crisis. Yet there is no reason for despair or for timidity. Protestantism has only to remember its original principles, and the duty incumbent upon it to shut its ears to no form of truth, and then it is impregnable. These are the principles which demolished Mediævalism ; which produced men of individual character ; which helped to found and develop modern culture. These principles are inseparably bound up with an element of puritanism and independence—even in places where there are no Puritans and no Independents. To exhibit the significance of this element is one of the chief objects of the*

*following pages. If our enemies think that they can underrate our power because we Protestants do not fight in close columns, is it not a maxim of the modern art of war that an attack in open order is, under certain circumstances, particularly effective?*

A. HARNACK.

*March 4th, 1899.*

## TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE.

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*Professor Harnack is now, I apprehend, too well known to the educated English public to need an introduction ; nor will any apology be expected for an attempt to render a recent utterance of his on some features of the remarkable development which is at present taking place in the religious life of our time. As one of the best scholars and historians that modern Germany has produced, nothing that he has to say on the great issue between Catholicism and Protestantism can fail to be attractive ; for while he is alive to all that is best in both these expressions of the human spirit, he is also wholly free from any trace of fanatical emotion.*

*I have no desire to dilate upon the greatness of the issue which is here involved, as it will be very present to the minds of all those*



who are likely to take up this little book ; nor do I wish to stand any longer than may be necessary between Professor Harnack and his readers. There are, however, two observations to be made : one relating to the circumstances under which the book originally appeared, and the other to the manner in which I have endeavoured to discharge the duties of translator.

*These Thoughts on the Present Position of Protestantism were first spoken to a small gathering of friends at Eisenach. A brief report published in a newspaper described them as a "radical repudiation of Christianity and of the Christian belief founded on the historical fact of the revelation of God in Christ." It was left to be supposed, after the approved fashion of theological polemics, that everything about the creed of Christendom that was not specifically mentioned in this brief report must be taken to be denied. Professor Harnack accordingly found himself the object of a very bitter attack. As he was unwilling to enter into controversy with*

*his accusers, he had no other course but to write down the thoughts as he uttered them, and to give them to the public ; adding that he spoke, not of the present state of Protestantism as a whole, but only of some aspects of it.*

*In my wish to make this version of what he said thoroughly intelligible to my own fellow-countrymen, I have, with Professor Harnack's full authority and approval, ventured upon a few departures from the exact words of the original. In so doing my sole object has been to give a general application to expressions which were in the first instance used of Germany alone, and thus to adapt them to the needs of a new audience. That that audience may be a large one is a hope which I entertain, not only out of considerations of personal friendship for the speaker, but also from the conviction that what he has to say is well worthy of our best attention.*

THOS. BAILEY SAUNDERS.

*March 9th, 1899.*



THOUGHTS  
ON  
THE PRESENT POSITION  
OF  
PROTESTANTISM.

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I

INTRODUCTORY

It is of the present and the future of Protestantism that I propose to speak, and not of the present and the future of the Protestant Churches; although in what I am going to say I shall obviously have to keep the condition of those Churches in view.

But—to state my opinion at once—I am not one of those who look upon the Protestant Churches as in a condition of decay, and think that they are destined to early extinction, or that they are even steering

towards a tremendous crisis. On the contrary, I believe that at the present time they are going through a period of strong consolidation, which will gain in strength, and that of downfall or of decay there are no signs whatever. From the time of their origin until now, and in a special degree in the nineteenth century, the Protestant Churches have been so closely bound up with the State, with Society, with Patriotism, with Tradition, with Authorities of various kinds, and with popular religious feeling, that they are become very solid structures difficult of attack. In the existing age they have taken root in the same way as ancient Christianity took root in the Roman Empire, and there is no evidence that their duration is to be briefer than that of the age itself. Is it not a fact that Government and Society, the religious and the indifferent, and, in a certain sense, even friend and foe, are emulously engaged in helping the Churches along the line of development on which they are at present moving, and assisting them to become more and more what the natural development of things tends to make them?

But if we turn our attention from the Protestant Churches to Protestantism itself, a very different spectacle meets our gaze. To use the language of commerce, the old Protestant house is still, certainly, a going concern; but in the course of history, as we know, houses have a way of degenerating. The world-historic degeneration of the apostolic house was what the Reformation detected in Catholicism. Can we say that the Protestant Churches are, perhaps, Protestant only in the sense in which the Catholic Churches are apostolic? Names, of course, will not decide the question; nor have we any guarantee that Protestantism will not go the way of all Confessions, which, partly by remaining stationary and partly by gradual transformation, are apt to change their character.

## II

### THE OLD PROTESTANTISM

WHAT was the old Protestantism? What were its essential characteristics?

The old Protestantism was a Church founded exclusively on *Articles of Faith* drawn from Holy Writ. Its aim was to make the knowledge and the understanding of Holy Writ accessible to all its members. It was convinced that it had done everything that was essential when it had proclaimed the true Faith to be found in the Bible.

In Protestantism there exists, then, a close, nay, an *exclusive* relation between Theology and Church. It is doctrine—and, in the main, doctrine is identical with the Creed and with *Theologia Sacra*—on which the Church is based. *Theologia Sacra*, and that alone, was what the Church had to teach and preach. The rest, it was felt, would come of itself. On “Enthusiasts” and persons of the like kind a zealous watch was

kept, so as to preclude of any additions being made to this fundamental idea. A strict puritanism in religion and in religious education was the result.

It was only this conscious and deliberate one-sidedness that produced impetus enough to achieve the greatest thing that can be achieved in history, namely, the reformation of a religion which is fixed in the soil with a thousand roots. The Word alone, and therefore the Doctrine alone, and Faith alone! To a condition of the soul which, although deeply stirred, was narrow and monotonous, and to an earthly existence in its nature depressed and always on the verge of extinction, this system of doctrine was, then, adapted. The inmost truth which the doctrine expressed was that the spoken Word becomes power and life solely by the work of the Holy Spirit, and that we should trust the Holy Spirit and await its coming. But at the same time, this belief of the Church, as *Notitia*, *Assensus*, and *Fiducia*,—that is to say, as *intellectual perception*, *intellectual assent*, and *complete trust*,—was expected to become, in an absolutely uniform manner, the personal possession



of each individual, and no one was to nourish himself on aught but the Word, of which *Theologia Sacra* was only the elaborated form.

This *Theologia Sacra*, in the sense of an infallible Bible doctrine, has ceased to exist. Let me remind the reader, in a few brief words, of the way in which "Theology" arose.

Theology has not always existed. At the beginning there was only prophecy and spiritual teaching. The man who, in the name of religion, delivered himself of a truth which he had perceived, or communicated a piece of religious admonition, did so at the instigation of the Spirit; and those who heard him were persuaded that he spoke because he was moved by the Spirit. But this period was of brief duration. Prophecy and spiritual teaching came to an end, and their place was taken by an intelligent Theology, working according to definite rules, for which, in regard to the Old Testament, the way had for a very long time been already prepared. *Theologia Sacra*, however, it was; for it had a *Sacred Text*—a double one, the New Testament as well as the Old—as its exclusive ground-work; and the con-

tention was advanced that only a sanctified intelligence was capable of expounding it. About this latter point, however, there was a little hesitation. That man's natural intelligence could, at least to some extent, grasp the right sense of Holy Writ, was also asserted; and the fact that a measure of secular knowledge was needful for its exposition could not easily be overlooked. But that was just the reason why, from the very beginning, Theology was regarded in the Church with distrust. This was an experience which even the first great theologian, Origen, had to encounter. A secular element was, then, of necessity taken up into Theology; although the division between secular and sacred—nay, the very right of the secular element to exist at all—remained doubtful.

In the Church of the Reformation and in the old Protestantism the position was not essentially different. The whole of the sacred element was still more exclusively than had been the case in Catholicism referred to the original record, and for this very reason the science which had to do with it remained *Theologia Sacra*. On this Protestantism

took its stand even more decidedly than Catholicism, which had created a foundation of a much more complicated kind, but one taken from life and its needs. For the rest, the double character of Theology remained, as before, undefined. On the one hand, people spoke as though the "pure understanding" of Holy Writ were a matter of natural reason and conscientious recognition; on the other, as if it were only the man who was illuminated by the Holy Ghost who was capable of getting at its meaning. When the Anabaptists attempted to separate *Theologia Sacra* into spiritual intuition (the "continued revelation," the "inner light") and natural knowledge, they were repudiated and condemned.

Notwithstanding this, *Theologia* regarded as *Sacra*, or as knowledge absolutely divine in its character, on the ground that it was drawn from the inspired text of the Bible, gradually disappeared. To show how that happened would carry us too far afield. First of all, the canon law was separated from the rest of the system, and passed into the form of a purely secular discipline. The history of the Church followed in its

train: it was recognised—in the Protestant Churches it was generally recognised in principle—that if a man adopts the historical point of view, he cannot at the same time apply it to the condition of Church or State prevailing for the moment. There arose a general demand for a history of the Church that should record the facts impartially, and should pay no special attention to the basis and the claims, whether real or supposed, of any particular Church. The most decisive step of all was taken when it was agreed that the understanding and the exposition of the Old and New Testaments were neither to be regulated by any “creed,” nor to be allowed, out of any regard for the sacredness of the text, to make use of other methods than those universally recognised in the sphere of philology and history. The application of this rule to Theology has produced a revolution which still vibrates throughout the whole of its domain. In substance it is but seldom that the rule is disputed by Protestants nowadays; and even those who brand its application in particular cases as sacrilegious do not in general refuse to recognise the principle.

How has this come about? Whose work has it been? No one has done it, and every one has done it. It is a consequence of *the historical sense*, the rise of which indicates a revolution in the history of mankind no less great than has been produced by the discoveries of natural science. *The conception of what knowledge means has altered.* We are all aware now that to dictate to knowledge the result at which it is to arrive is to make knowledge impossible.

The principle which has here come to the surface can no longer be kept down. "Truth is like a spring of water: we must either allow it to run its course, or be prepared to see it break out in some other place where we shall least welcome it." That there has been no lack of strange cataclysms, no one with any knowledge of the course of human affairs will be ignorant. Thus, in a recent treatise on New Testament dogma, the demand was made in all seriousness that any opinion as to the relative value of documents should be excluded from the consideration of the early history of Christianity, — that everything should be reduced to one and the same level.

But even in this demand—which, if complied with, would make the writing of history an absolutely uncritical procedure, and bring it down to a very low standard—we may recognise a conscientious endeavour to keep the scientific perception of facts pure and unmixed with any alien elements. Nay, more : no one with any insight can maintain that the exegetical and historical examination of the New Testament on any emancipated method has led to increasingly radical results. The contrary is the case. Not only are questions as to the origin and the authenticity of the New Testament writings now handled with more caution and with greater respect for Tradition than was formerly the case, but the distinctive character of the Christian religion, and the distinctive character of the religious life generally, are more sharply and more objectively defined than before. Nor is there any doubt that a real understanding of the words of the Bible can proceed only from the man who is profoundly moved by its spirit. Here, of course, I must not be understood to mean that there is any sacred Tradition before which historical research has simply to lay down its arms.

### III

#### THE DECLINE OF THEOLOGY

Is it science, then, that has exploded Theology in the old sense of the word, and taken away its "sacredness"? Yes; but science is only one of the factors which have been at work in the process. The other must be looked for in the Church itself. Those who are loudest in their lamentations over the loss of *Theologia Sacra* have themselves had a large share in dissolving it.

What I mean is that, with the transformation of Theology, there has gone on for decades a parallel transformation in the relation between Theology and Church. From the time that Schleiermacher first explained the true nature of Religion and of Church, the exclusive relation between Theology and Church, which used to characterize the old Protestantism, has yielded in every direction. It is not dogmatic systems alone that excite scepticism, or, what is more significant, in-

difference; nay, all the camps in the Church are ready to apply to dogmatics the old saying that "systems are the misfortune of science"; but in regard to Theology as doctrine and as historical knowledge there prevails a dislike and depreciation in which eminent leaders of the most diverse parties in the Church are thoroughly at one. There was a time when Protestant theologians used to be the arbiters in all questions affecting the Church; to-day, it is only the Protestant theologians who are called into court at all. There was a time when Theology exercised an absolute sway; now it is pushed into the background, or else the work which it performs is described as a *quantité négligeable*, as a barren and unpractical element in the service of the Church.

Nor is it only in regard to so called modern Theology that this is the case. That "Theology does not so very much matter" is an expression which I have heard and seen innumerable times,—although it is, I admit, more often whispered lightly than proclaimed aloud. Nevertheless, from the Church's point of view, the work done by professors of



Theology is designated, with a gradually increasing degree of candour, as superfluous and disturbing. "Undogmatic Christianity," or Philanthropy, or something else that has not yet come over the horizon, is, we are told, to take its place. Theology, apparently, can do no more for us; it only hampers the vivid realization of the forces of religion. This is a conviction which, although in very different ways, I think that I can glean as much from the pages of some of our religious journals as from the powerful sermons and earnest admonitions of certain of our popular preachers and religious philosophers.<sup>1</sup>

I am not sitting in judgment on this state of things. I am only trying to represent it as I see it. That this state of things is a necessary reaction against the old one-sided Protestant view, which sought to make religion depend exclusively on doctrine, is certain; nor can we ignore the fact that,

<sup>1</sup> Prof. Harnack here refers by name to the *Reichsbote*, an influential German Church newspaper; to Herr Naumann, a Lutheran clergyman, who during the last few years has attracted much attention by his views; and to Baron von Soden, Professor of New Testament Exegesis in the University of Berlin.—Tr.

behind this comparative indifference to Theology, there lies an active endeavour to take religion out of the province of Intellectualism, and to do more justice to its various forces and the various shapes in which it expresses itself.

But, it is objected, how can we speak of any neglect of Theology at a time when the cry *Back to the Creed!* has made itself heard in such loud and vehement tones? How can we complain of any want of due respect for Theology in an age which has witnessed the labours of so energetic a theologian as Ritschl, and the universal attention which those labours have attracted?

So far as the first objection is concerned, we shall have to consider it in greater detail immediately. As regards the second, there is no denying the fact that the doctrinal element in the old Protestantism is a marked feature of Ritschl's theology. In this respect he is, so far, the latest Father of the Lutheran Church; for it was his distinctive work to have strengthened the old elements of which Protestantism consisted—the element of doctrine and the element of original religious

feeling—and to have kept them closely united. But just as in this respect he forms an exception, so the manner in which his theological labours were received showed that Protestantism no longer possessed any sympathy or understanding for the position which he took up. It was only a few theologians of the old Lutheran School—men of the strictest regard for observances, and therefore undiplomatic—who regarded the old Protestant tendency of his doctrines with any gratitude. The remainder—putting aside his disciples—felt that they were perhaps even more repelled by the very energetic theological demands which he made than by some of his questionable ideas. That he was an out-and-out theologian ; that he did not hesitate to issue precepts under the ægis of Theology ; that he had no trace of the traditionalist about him, or of the liturgist, or of the virtuoso with whom one may talk, or of the latitudinarian who lets others talk, or of the ecclesiastical statesman who works by indirect means—that was what most astonished and repelled the world in this powerful personality.

The reception accorded to Ritschl, the

Protestant theologian, is, then, only fresh evidence of the fact that the estimation in which the Church holds Theology is rapidly diminishing. Whilst Theology has been subordinating itself to the claims of general knowledge, the Church, partly as a consequence of this, and partly impelled by quite other forces, has been separating itself from Theology, or, at least, has been bursting the bonds which have made Church exclusively dependent on Theology.

## IV

### THE CATHOLICIZING MOVEMENT

WHAT are these other forces? They may be described in one word as *the progressive Catholicizing of the Protestant Churches*. Out of the enormous body of widely different facts which lie ready to hand as a basis for this assertion, I shall endeavour to pick out a few. They will make clear in what sense the word *Catholicizing* is to be here understood.

The first thing to notice relates to the very conception of a Church. What we in Germany call the evangelical conception of a Church has almost vanished ; and if anyone in practical life ventures to remind people of it, he is cried down as an unpractical dreamer. The majority of our influential clerical newspapers, with which must also be reckoned one or two political journals, go to work with ideas which are quite Catholic. One of these Church newspapers I have been reading regularly now for several years, and in all its countless

references to the Church I cannot remember ever to have come across a single passage in which full justice was done to the seventh article of the Augsburg Confession.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, it generally speaks as if the Church of Jesus Christ were simply the ecclesiastical institution, with its majorities, its doctrinal regulations, its equipment—so long as the Church is active in the sense desired by the Church newspapers. Without the slightest hesitation all the promises of Christ are transferred to this institution. Hardly any distinction is drawn between the Church of the Faith and the National Church; and all decisions and regulations of the National Church, so far as they are agreeable to the greater number, are placed under the protection of sacred authority. “The Church speaks,” “the Church demands”—these are

<sup>1</sup> The Seventh Article of the great Protestant Declaration, drawn up by Melanchthon at the Imperial Diet at Augsburg in 1530, is as follows:—

“Item docent, quod una sancta ecclesia perpetuo mansura sit. Est autem ecclesia congregatio sanctorum, in qua evangelium recte docetur et recte administrantur sacramenta. Et ad veram unitatem ecclesiae satis est consentire de doctrina evangelii et administratione sacramentorum. Nec necesse est ubique esse similes traditiones humanas seu ritus aut caeremonias ab hominibus institutas.”

the expressions which are used towards the State and towards people of other opinions, as though we had to do with the Voice of God and the Voice of the World; whereas very frequently all that we have to do with is the wishes of shortsighted majorities,—in the matter of questions, too, in which the State, grown, as it has, on a ground of Christian culture, offers a much safer guarantee.

So sure of its goal, and so victoriously, and with such elemental force, does this process of the Catholicizing of the evangelical conception of a Church advance, that our ecclesiastical authorities have evidently great difficulty in standing out against it. Now and then they censure this or that erroneous doctrine with the circumspection and the wisdom which long ecclesiastical experience provides; but in the face of the profound transformation which is taking place under their very eyes in the conception of the Church they are almost powerless. The reason of this is that the conception is gradually acquiring the authority of a new dogma, and seems to be indissolubly bound up with the religious feelings of the majority of the devout. Such feelings every

form of ecclesiastical government must respect. Added to this Catholic conception of the Church, which identifies the Church of the Faith with the Church of History, we evangelicals are also gradually experiencing everything that naturally goes with it—fanaticism, the despotic tendency, impatience, a mania for persecution, clerical uniform, and clerical police. This is a fact which is quite obvious ; a fact which has already asserted itself. It is not God Almighty who is building for himself a Church of the Faithful within our Churches, but it is majorities who are to build them, and to undertake all the responsibility for them.

It can surprise no one that, with the burdens which their business imposes, these majorities have lost all courage, all cheerful confidence, all patience ; and that, with scolding and complaint, abuse and persecution, and a political effort which would fain set all the powers of the earth in motion, they are labouring away at their wearisome task. Even in their language, as every educated person will recognize, they have already revived the tone of Cyprian and the Mediæval contro-



versialists. The appeal to force, too, and the cry for the suppression of all who think otherwise, which takes the form of Church discipline, is very intelligible. How far this is to go, or whether the secular arm will not be moved in its support, does not yet appear.

The Catholicizing of the conception of the Church is the most powerful of the radical transformations which Protestantism is undergoing in the nineteenth century. But some of the most important consequences which have followed from these transformations are asserting themselves with independent strength. In this connection the position now adopted towards the Creed deserves to be mentioned first. I have observed above that in the Protestant Churches of the present day *Theology* has been pushed into the background, because of the desire which prevails to find a broader and less disturbed basis. All the more keenly, then, is the authority of the *Creed* promoted. But in what sense? In the same sense in which the Catholic Church demands *a respect for Tradition*, together with a respect for the Scriptures. In the Catholic Church, Tradition

is, in the first instance, a *legal ordinance*, which obliges to *obedience* and *devotion*; it is not so much a doctrine as the definite unalterable form of the very existence of the Church. But the old Protestantism, however earnestly it took the Creed, was never able to forget that the Creed is a collective statement of the Faith necessary to salvation; that it exists only for the Faith, and must be continually prepared to undergo correction through a better understanding of the Word of God. But anyone who, in contradistinction with this view, sets up the Creed, whether the strictly Lutheran Creed or any portion of it, as an unalterable legal ordinance, and demands subjection to it before all things—nay, sees in such subjection the preliminary condition of Protestant Christianity,—anyone who does this, I say, is to that extent of the Catholic opinion.

How far we have progressed in this direction! Nowadays no one is any longer expected to take over the old Protestant teaching in its hard entirety as a spiritual possession, and to become its champion. If we may judge by what we see and hear, very

few people seem to be interested in the literature of the Creed. Church newspapers and men who consider themselves orthodox are guilty of gross offences against the old doctrines of the Church. The evangelical doctrines of Freedom and Grace, of Justification, of the Church, and so on, are, in the name of Orthodoxy, distorted by heresies, without even a single voice being raised against the process, which no one seems to notice. Even the old dogmatic Christology is often reproduced in such a raw form, and so curtailed, that there is some difficulty in believing in any very profound comprehension of it on the part of its representatives. Nevertheless, in spite of all this, the demand that the Creed should be authoritative is advanced all the more loudly and *sans phrase*. Every man is left to take up what inner attitude he will towards its separate articles; but in no single point must he doubt or attack the Creed, because it has to be recognised as the fundamental ordinance of the Church which must never be touched. Whilst in the peculiar constitution of Protestantism ecclesiastical controversies over

particular points of doctrine are inevitable ; whilst they are evidence of a lively and profound interest in religion, and therefore must be calmly and patiently fought out as realities, in the certainty that the light of the Gospel will never be quenched, every controversy is now regarded more or less as an act of hostility to "the Church." By a necessary consequence, cases of doctrine are transformed, just as in Catholicism, into cases of insubordination ; obedience and devotion have the appearance of being attacked, and the attitude assumed by the dominant party is the outcome of that union of bitterness and fear which is characteristic of wounded authority and offended self-esteem. In what way the point of doctrine attacked may be vindicated is the last thing that is considered. What happens is that a few apologetic observations are dropped, but no one pays them any real attention, because they lead to the delicate and uncomfortable ground of Theology ; and if by any necessity the ground has to be trodden, all that we see is that the apologists are reduced to a helpless and stammering expression of wildly incon-

sistent views. It is the *person* rather than the opinion of the enemy which calls for demolition : he must be clearly shown that his heresy consists in rebellion against a legal ordinance. To handle the Creed thus is to treat it in the Catholic manner ; and as a result, it is more and more withdrawn from the inner life of the layman, and erected into a law for the cleric. I should be sorry to believe that it was said lately of a certain theologian : " If only he would exchange the theological faculty for the philosophical ! We should then have a believing philosopher instead of an unbelieving theologian ; " but things have gone so far that the utterance is not impossible. What a notion of faith, and what an idea of the relation between laymen and clergy, underlie such an utterance, I need not point out.

Hand in hand with this changed attitude towards the Creed goes the attempt to produce complete uniformity in the services of the Church through the agency of ecclesiastical police, and to fix the doctrine to be taught as though it were a liturgical programme. This is a tendency which is

absolutely opposed to the old idea of Protestantism ; but we are already in the midst of a liturgical catholicizing of our Churches. The Protestant principle was that the Church service should be something free, something appealing to the soul ; and however little doubt there may be that it requires to be subject to certain regulations, there is just as little doubt that they must not be more than regulations, within which the minister, the congregation and the individual Christian must be able to move with freedom. To impose an order of divine service as though it were a legal ordinance ; to regard the punctilious performance of an appointed ritual as a matter of the most important and sacred necessity ; to misuse ritual for the purpose of oppressing the conscience of individual Christians, of intimidating them, of compelling and burdening the expression of their faith—all this is not Protestant. This is the very point at which the Reformation made a stand, and to attack its puritanism and its liberty at this point means to do violence to its inmost character. But how uncertain many thousands of Protestants are

become about this very point. The process is carried even to the length of utilizing the regulations made from time to time for the conduct of divine service, so as in this way to combat objectionable tendencies in Theology. The ship is being steered full sail into the most perilous waters, and, as usual, the indifferent are the silent allies of the Catholicizing majority. "A Church," they say, "must have fixed rules. It is only when we have imitated the example of the Catholic Church in this respect that Protestantism will be a Church and a Power."

Along with these main changes there are plenty of symptoms which indicate the fatal approximation to Catholic forms. In a very un-Protestant fashion the Sacraments are being *separated from the Word*, and, side by side with it, are being endowed with a special and mysterious value. The puritanism of Protestantism is being rudely assailed by such an expression as "the holy vessels," and many others of the same sort, as well as by the kind of sanctity which is beginning to be attributed to things used in divine service, and its forms and seasons. Descriptions of

Church visitations and other ceremonies are given in a tone as though the matters in hand were of hierarchical institution. The ministry is, in a very suspicious fashion, elevated above the other ranks and classes of Christians. The supervision and control inevitable in any ordered Church system, and the various degrees of the clerical office, appear as though they were surrounded with a glamour as of something specially sacred. People have a fondness for speaking of the chief ministers of the Church as "Chief Shepherds," and would gladly see them invested with the glory and dignity of Catholic bishops ; their public appearances are described as though it were God's messenger come to the congregation ; and at their graves, as the newspapers assure us, prayers have been offered that God would hear "for the sake of his servant." How hard it is for these men to set themselves in opposition to the un-Protestant ideas which fasten on their office, and what a full measure of Catholic aspiration is expressed in the phrase "independence of the Church"! Those who fill the highest office in the Church—surely it is



the most difficult of all offices nowadays—are expected to interfere everywhere, to issue orders, to let nothing come into existence and grow, nothing appear and pass away of itself; but instead of exercising patience, impartiality and indirect control, to be the police office which in matters of daily controversy in the Church takes its orders from the majority.

It is not only in these suspicious developments that we may observe the transformation of the old Protestantism into something new, but also in phenomena of an agreeable kind. Here too, however, we may speak of a catholicizing, that is to say, of a universalizing and politicalizing of the Protestant Churches. There was a time when Protestantism was a Church of preaching, a school of catechizing, and nothing more — “the Word,” it was said, “alone must do it.” How much richer and more complex in its manifestations is Protestantism now become! A flourishing unity of life has been developed on evangelical foundations. Deacons and deaconesses, city missionaries, Sunday-school teachers of both sexes, are carrying on a great work. In short, the proclamation of the

Word and the practice of Religion have created for themselves the most various and graduated organs. Religious meetings, too, whether public or private, have taken very manifold forms. Religion is forcing its way into all the professional walks of mankind, into all corporations, and there setting up Christian fellowship, and a footing of Christian morality. The Churches are paying attention to that multitude of topics which we call the Social Question, and are trying to bear their share in alleviating misery and distress. What a different picture is presented by the Protestantism of three hundred years ago compared with the Protestantism of to-day!

In all these factors taken together, we have what may be described as the Catholicizing of Protestantism, and every one of us is in some degree affected by the transformation. But the critical thing for us nowadays is that, whilst the old, narrow, doctrinal form of Protestantism is going; whilst the old relation between Theology and Church exists no more; whilst the religious character of an earlier time has proved inadequate; and whilst something new, therefore, in the way of

extension, reform, and consolidation has, with perfect justice, declared itself, *a clear insight into the conditions of the Protestant Life is on the point of disappearing*. Unless this corrective be retained, we shall inevitably become the mere double of Catholicism. That double may, indeed, be a Church which will accomplish great things, and comfort and encourage the souls of men ; but the spirit of evangelical Faith and Freedom will have vanished out of it.

## V

### THE THREATENED DANGER

A FEW years ago, an enlightened French Catholic wrote a remarkable essay in the *Revue des deux Mondes*. I will quote some of his expressions, with the thoughts which they suggested to me, just as they come to mind.

“France is the most orthodox country in the world, because in matters of religion the most indifferent. Catholicism, as it is, gives us just what we want: a comprehensive religion, a religion full of myths, superstitions, and absurdities; and, on the other hand, full of profound ideas, significant ritual, and flourishing symbolism; invested with an artistic charm, and yet of an ascetic character; adapted to every kind of mood or temper, while still retaining all the rings of historical growth in its mighty trunk. Doubts and soul-tormenting questions there are none; and when they arise, authority at once steps

in. But no one, and least of all an educated layman, is expected to assimilate this enormous system of religion as an intellectual possession, and regard it with faith. On the contrary, towards it and in it, all attitudes are possible and tolerable; and even the scoffer observes a side of it which reduces his sneers to silence. Here, then, every individuality finds its account; a woman lives herself into it otherwise than a man; the believer takes to it in one way, the free-thinker in another; for he too respects it, and he smiles. The priests are alone charged with keeping the whole of it in force, and this is impossible if they are not initiated into the system when they are young, and kept from the influence of modern culture, and more especially of science. The education given in the seminaries is, therefore, just the right thing. Above all things, don't let us have an intellectual religion; it would immediately begin to make claims, and try to master the heads and consciences of men. This, says the Catholic, is what happens in Protestantism, which is, accordingly, narrow, limited, presumptuous, and importunate. Protestantism

demands that everyone shall believe the same thing, and really believe in his inmost heart everything that the Church believes, and by it regulate his whole view of the world and the conduct of his life. That is just the reason why it is so divided and politically so powerless,—a mere refuge for perverse and narrow minds. How large is Catholicism in comparison, how universal and how elastic !”

The image of Catholicism which is here portrayed is the image that threatens us. But, it may be asked, why not accept the development? Why not make a clean sweep of our private opinions, and of our theology; why not establish ourselves in the new Church which is forming under our eyes—just as Origen established himself in the Church of the third century? Why not acquiesce in that which we cannot prevent—the Church which majorities, newspapers, and the mass of the indifferent are labouring to bring in, with such a certainty of reaching their goal? Do not we ourselves share the ideas from which they start? Have not we, too, finally broken with Intellectualism in the sphere of Religion? Do not we, too, desire that Religion, un-

hampered by the burden of doctrine, should intervene, free and elastic, in all the complicated conditions and moods of life? Do not we, too, recognize that the old Protestantism was hard and narrow? Then why do we hesitate? Rather let us come to terms with the Church by submitting to it, by *implicit faith* in it,—a single effort of will, and it is done; let us hasten into the arms of our brethren, bury the hatchet, and in peaceable rivalry help them to build up the Church. Since in matters of belief and doctrine men are not to be brought under a single rule, let the wiser among us give way, and go on giving way, until only the most robust creeds hold the field. Those who want a great Church must adapt themselves to its character and its dress. The reasonable people, the intellectuals, the esoterics, have always been no more than an insignificant sect in the Church. Let them veil their thoughts as they please. There are a hundred different ways of introducing elastic variations under a given formula, and just as many methods of disguising a known truth. And is not it just when veiled that Truth is most attractive? We

lift the veil, say something, and drop it again. Can what is ultimate in Religion be grasped in words at all? If not, why should we not be content with words? Why not be silent?

Fascinating, no doubt, this is. Who that has thought at all or suffered at all but has felt the temptation. *But it is temptation*; for it is an end of Protestantism, of the Gospel, of Truth. If the development insensibly advances, and we simply capitulate to it, a second Catholicism will be formed out of the consolidation of Protestantism; but it will be poorer and of less religious intensity than the first.

*For Roman Catholicism possesses the Pope, and the Saints and Monks.* These we shall not get. In the monkish tendency to Saint-making, in this devout and world-shunning piety of Catholicism, there lies an immense religious impulse, something that corrects the complex and worldly character of the Church. This we do not possess. In the Papacy there is the power of adaptation to the conditions of the age, a *personal* authority over against the authority of the letter, the preservation



of the idea, even though politically transformed and distorted, that the Church of God is not to be governed in the end by a Tradition, but through men moved by the Spirit of God. But if Protestantism were to remain permanently on the lines set by Catholicism, it could never command such powerful agencies; for it is founded on ideas which preclude them. However many radical transformations it may experience, it must always retain this unalterable characteristic, that it aims at producing Believers, and not Saints, and, consequently, it leaves the development of outer and inner life in the form of an ascetic piety to the individual himself.

Even here, in the domain of Protestantism, there are flashes observable which throw a light on Catholic tendencies. As the latest piece of knowledge and wisdom we are told that the original and classical form of Religion must always be and remain a state of ecstasy, a vision, the ascetic *vita coelestis*. This supposition leads us straight to the Catholic position that the Saints are the true *religiosi*, and that believers who follow in their train are *religiosi* only in the second degree. It

rejects the Protestant opinion that Faith is everywhere of the first moment, that it is everything, and that it creates, in manifold types, God's children independent and free. This atavistic way of looking at Religion, although, of course, it contains much that may be taken to heart, we may, however, leave out of account. It will never be a dominating force in Protestantism ; it will never be able to banish the conviction that, the more calmly, happily, and peacefully Religion permeates the whole man, the higher does it stand.

## VI

### COUNTERBALANCING CONSIDERATIONS

THE prospect which up till now has opened out before us is a critical and anxious one. But we may thank God that there is something to counterbalance it; that there are some forces in the Church which are working against any un-Protestant consolidation. The reader will have long been expecting me to mention them, for he must have had them already in his mind.

There are two elements which are still alive throughout the domain of Protestantism. One of them—I have just hinted at it—is the conviction that in the end Religion is only a steadfast temper of the soul, rooted in childlike trust in God; that firm, cheerful confidence which Paul Gerhardt has so well expressed: “Is God for me, then let all else oppose me!—*Ist Gott für mich, so trete gleich Alles wider mich!*” The other is that this childlike trust is inseparably bound up

with the plain, simple rule that the moral life, in all its solemnity and earnestness, is the correlative of Religion, and that without it Religion becomes idolatry and a deception of the soul. These convictions — they are summed up in the Beatitudes—are the strength of Protestantism and its hidden treasure. Just as they unquestionably form its foundation within the boundaries of our common Christianity, so they are at the same time the essential content of the Gospel itself. For investigate the words of Christ as much as we please ; bring them into as close relation as we like with the thought of his time, and with the apocalyptic and ascetic ideas then current, we shall come in the end to the old opinion of the Church, that the essence of the Gospel is not to be sought in these secondary things, but in the preaching of the Fatherhood of God, and the forgiveness of sins, and in the solemnity and earnestness with which the moral law is here separated off from irreligious perversions, and impressed on the conscience.

But I cannot speak of these high matters without laying a wreath of profound gratitude

on the tomb of Albrecht Ritschl. He grasped the fundamental ideas of the Gospel and of the Reformation with vigour and insight, and separated them from the romantic, ecclesiastical, philosophical, and mystical entanglements and fetters in which they had become involved. What he discovered was not new; other men may have deserved thanks in other respects; but multitudes of Christians throughout the world owe to him the confidence and the joy which they feel. This we shall never forget.

*The two primary elements of the Christian Religion which I have just mentioned are still at work in our Protestant Churches; they still live in the hearts even of those with whom we, as theologians, are compelled to contend; and if we have despaired of Protestantism, it was only because our view has been tinged with a one-sided pessimism. Even in these critical times we shall remain true to its banner; we shall remain in our National Church; we shall fight in the Church which has not lost its heritage; we shall fight for the Church, so that it may retain its crown; that with the consolidation, extension;*

and politicalization which it is undergoing in our day, it may not become an institution only half holy ; that it may continue to exist as a Church of Faith, Freedom, and Patience. We are not in a position to lead the Church, but we can put forth some effort that will counterbalance the evil ; and because we can do this, it is a sacred duty which we dare not renounce. Let us not forget, either, that in every period through which Protestantism has passed, it has continued to exist in spite of the greatest dangers from within. A Protestantism pure and simple, there never has been. If we fight, it is only as our fathers have fought before us.

## VII

### OUR DUTY

WHAT is it, then, that we want? What can be done? I shall ask three questions, and try briefly to answer them.

*If, having broken with the Intellectualism of the old Protestant system, our National Churches are being consolidated on a broader basis, what conception do we form of the Protestant and evangelical faith?*

It is, of course, possible for a time to have a community of temper and feeling without a common Creed; a community of temper resting on fixed principles, actually maintained. But although we may so postpone, we must never abandon, the endeavour to add a new Creed to those which already exist,—a Creed which shall contain the essential articles of the Saving Faith as a standard for the office of the ministry and the guidance of the Church. Some such fixed standard is indispensable to a Church

as a means of defence and of attack. Nor can a Creed like this be developed without coming to some definite terms with contemporary culture, with the knowledge that has been gained of nature and of history. It must be a brief summary of the doctrine of the Faith, and its true mission will always consist in being an *apologia* as well. The demand for an undogmatic Christianity is a mistake; and so is the assertion that the independence of religion is best to be effected by leaving other spheres of intellectual effort to themselves. The moral elements in Protestantism do not, of course, require any formulation; we may thank God that they are self-evident. The old Creeds were, then, wholly in the right in giving expression to the essence and kernel of the Christian religion—belief in God, and in Jesus Christ the Son of God. Upon the path of the old Creeds we must remain; satisfied with them we cannot be. The entanglements of history divide us from them; and not one of us can simply put himself back into the situation, the pre-existing conditions, and the state of knowledge, in which they originated. That is



why in the Church of to-day they can no longer be put into operation again in the same sharply-defined manner as before. Everywhere there are parts of them to be cancelled or modified.

But this is a state of things which cannot go on for ever ; otherwise the history of the Protestant Churches would threaten to end in the domain of unpredictable vicissitudes, and to be given over to the arbitrary guidance of majorities. However little, in human calculation, the present age may be suited to the construction of a Creed, and whatever scorn and mockery may be poured upon those who put forward any such demand, the effort to state the old Faith anew, and to state it simply and clearly in the language of our own time, is one which we must not abandon. The broader and firmer the foundation upon which a National Church is consolidated, the more necessity is there for giving expression in the Creed of the day to its evangelical and Protestant character ; for the Protestant Churches are the Churches of the Word, of the Faith, and heartfelt assent. In this sense, then, we cannot desire that the old Protestant

connection between Theology and Church should come to an end. Theology must remain as the guide of the Church ; for its chief function—even though it may have become an historical science—can never be anything but all the more surely to grasp and represent to us the image of the personality of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

*If, having broken with the Intellectualism of the old Protestant system, our National Churches are being consolidated on a broader basis, how are we to educate ourselves and our nation in the truths of Religion ?*

Our education must be in what is handed down to us through the old doctrines of the Faith ; and, without doubt, we shall make a diligent use of the treasures which it contains. Nor will we forget that a tree can grow only within its own bark, and that we must everywhere respect the links that bind us with the past.

But here there is a twofold consideration to which I must specially advert. We Germans are not elastic enough in exploiting the treasures of modern thought, and turning them to the advantage of religious education.

How much further advanced in this respect is Christianity in England ! What a broad and deep stream of religious thought pervades literature there ; and, conversely, how energetically and comprehensively Religion there takes part in all intellectual movements ! In all this we, on the other hand, have made only a modest beginning ; and where with us Religion tries to come into relation with literature, it never does so, as a rule, except in a childish fashion. And yet what treasures lie hidden in our literature ! It is precisely our classical writers who may serve to deepen and defend the religious sense. I refer only to Goethe ; to his *Conversations with Eckermann*, for example, his *Maxims and Reflections*, and much of the like kind. We cannot expect our faith to become a power in the intellectual life of the nation unless we are enabled to show that the profoundest results attained in human life and in history coalesce in the Faith, and from it receive energy and consecration.

But there is another direction in which our religious education requires to be supplemented. To learn to understand the sentence

in our Catechism, "where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation," is the goal of all Christian education ; but I am not, I believe, mistaken when I assert that we must show how the evangelical faith, just because it is a faith in the forgiveness of sins, creates cheerful, courageous, and independent personalities. Here, too, there is a call for us to expand and to grow in spiritual wealth. How many were the types of the religious life and the Christian character which were produced and fostered by Mediæval Catholicism ! Let us in this respect try to imitate Catholicism on Protestant ground. Truly it is not uniform institutions that our age demands, but personalities of the most various type—wide-awake, rounded, free. That is why I thought that the movement inaugurated by Naumann deserved a joyful welcome. It seemed to be evidence that free and independent personalities were undertaking a great work on a positive, Christian foundation. Although the Gospel may have no regular social programme, the Christian conscience is becoming keener in making a common effort to

remedy the misery and distress of our fellow-men. This deepening of the conscience must have a beneficial effect on the formation of Christian character.

*If, having broken with the Intellectualism of the old Protestant system, our National Churches are in danger of going over to a sham Catholicism, in what light are we to regard our position in the Church?*

After what I have said, there is little more on this subject that I have to say. We must build and have patience. We can neither lead the Churches as they exist, nor destroy them, nor can we wish to set up new ones. We are members of a National Church, where we have received our vocation. We know that in the chief articles of evangelical belief we are at one with it, and in it, too, we have plenty of room, plenty of freedom to live and work as our consciences dictate. Struggles there will be; they will wax hotter; but even the highest and the mightiest will never make us weary, and never make us other than cheerful. *Impossibile est ut non laetatur qui sperat in Domino!*

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